

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE **A-31**

NEW YORK TIMES  
1 November 1984

**ESSAY** | William Safire

# Retracing the Analysis

WASHINGTON

**M**argaret Thatcher escaped and Indira Gandhi was cut down; Ronald Reagan lived and Anwar Sadat died; the Pope survived and a pro-Solidarity Polish priest was secretly murdered. Every world leader is the target of some madman, or nationalist group, or religious fanatic, or other world leader willing to employ terrorists.

That last category most worries our strategists. If it turns out that a few journalists were right about the involvement of the K.G.B.-controlled Bulgarian secret police in the shooting of the Pope, then the trust that detenteniks put in agreements with the Soviet Union is misplaced.

The evidence of conspiracy produced by Italian prosecutors means that our C.I.A., charged with keeping the President and National Security Council informed about the international crime of the century, was inept in its fact-gathering and wholly mistaken in its evaluation.

We know that some of our intelligence operatives did all they could to pour cold water on the story and to discourage the Italian authorities from pursuing their investigation.

As detailed here two years ago, the C.I.A. vice-chief of station in Rome scoffed at Interior Minister Virginio Rognoni's description of the conspiracy to kill the Pope. "You have no proof," insisted our man on the scene, in the presence of an astounded Senate Committee staff member. This derogation paralleled a Soviet campaign to dissociate the K.G.B. from any connection with the deed.

"I think it is absolutely scandalous," charged Zbigniew Brzezinski after more evidence appeared this week, "that some officials in the State Department and some senior officials in the C.I.A. were unwitting — or in some cases, perhaps even witting — tools of that campaign."

When a former national security adviser grumbles about his dovish former adversaries in the State Department, that's not news; but when a man of experience in the use of intelligence information suggests the possibility of a "witting tool" — or mole — in the C.I.A., that is worthy of note.

Mr. Brzezinski has more than a passing interest in this case. As he recounts in his memoir, during the first week of December 1980 the C.I.A. warned of the imminence of a Soviet Army move into Poland. The lame-duck President authorized his national security adviser to put in a call to the Pope to brief him on our information. Speaking in Polish, Mr. Brzezinski and the Pope had a conversation that was, in Zbig's words, "historically unique."

The Russians must have known of this call, as well as of other activities of Pope John Paul II in his native Poland, where Solidarity was catching fire. Yuri Andropov, then head of the K.G.B., could logically have come to the conclusion that only the elimination of the leading symbol of Polish nationalism would end the incipient revolt. Six months later, the attack on the Pope took place.

Since that time, Mr. Brzezinski and an associate who was formerly the C.I.A. station chief in Ankara have been among the few to encourage reporters to follow this story. This was in the face of repeated C.I.A. evaluations given to the Senate Intelligence Committee, and presumably to the President, that the "tradecraft was too clumsy" for the assassination attempt to have involved the Russians.

The conspiracy theorists seem now to have been right and the official pooh-poohers wrong. In any well-run intelligence agency, an error of this magnitude would result in a laborious operation called "retracing the analysis." The purpose would be to discover who made what wrong assessments, based on what misleading information, from what sources now to be considered unreliable — and why we tried to help the Russians by disseminating the mistaken analysis.

In that way, the C.I.A. would learn who misinformed our policy makers and why. If it was just sloppy work, the offenders would learn from their mistakes. If Mr. Brzezinski's carefully raised suspicion is correct, and some tools of Russian disinformation were "witting" — surely a long shot, but never to be overlooked — then the retracing would prove not only good management, but good security.

Now it is up to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, with Senators Durenberger and Leahy replacing Senators Goldwater and Moynihan, to make certain the agency does the retracing. The purpose is not to embarrass, but to correct. If assassination is a weapon the Russians have been using, in what Pope John Paul called today "the chain of atrocity that is staining the world with blood," we cannot afford to have naïve C.I.A. operatives in the field. □